

The IRON CLAW

by Arthur Stringer

SYNOPSIS.

On Windward Island Pallidori intrigues Mrs. Golden into an appearance of evil which causes Golden to capture and torture the Italian by branding his face and crushing his hand. Pallidori opens the dyke gates and floods the island and in the general rush to escape the flood kidnaps Golden's six-year-old daughter Margory. Twelve years later in New York a Masked One calling himself "the Hammer of Gold" rescues an eighteen-year-old girl from the idiot Casavanti, to whom Jules Legar has delivered her, and takes her to the home of Enoch Golden, millionaire, whence she is recaptured by Legar, Legar and Stein are discovered by Manley, Golden's secretary, setting fire to Golden's building, but escape. Margory's mother fruitlessly implores Enoch Golden to find their daughter. The Masked One again takes Margory away from Legar.

FOURTH EPISODE

THE NAME AND THE GAME

Legar had reason to feel well pleased with his morning's work. Deceived for the time being, in one quarter, he promptly swung about and struck at another.

His attack, in this instance, was directed at nothing less than Enoch Golden's own home. There, effecting an entrance through a neglected coal chute before even the servants were astir, he had crept stealthily upward until he found refuge in a trunk room. Through the door crack of this trunk room, however, he soon had the dubious pleasure of beholding a figure quite as stealthy as his own, a figure that wore a laughing mask and made its way cautiously downward to the door of Enoch Golden's study. On that door the masked figure, before vanishing as quietly as it had first appeared, pinned an oblong paper. Stealing up to it, Legar read:

Enoch Golden: You have proved a disappointment to me. Despite my warnings, you still oppress the poor and abuse your power. Your daughter has been saved from the clutches of Legar, and at the proper time will be produced. But that time will not come until you have changed your ways of life. So while still you have the chance, do some good deed!

THE LAUGHING MASK.

Legar, having thoughtfully perused this strange warning, promptly added a postscript:

As a slight sign of my disapproval, I am appropriating your fifty thousand dollars from the vaults of the Third National bank, for which I now take occasion to thank you.

Ten minutes later Legar had made his escape from the house and was speeding southward in his car, to confer with his own men as to the approaching assault on Golden's wealth in the Third National vaults.

The Laughing Mask himself, in the meantime, was busy with his own en-



A Figure That Wore a Laughing Mask.

terprise. He had rescued Margory Golden from Legar, it was true, but her conveyance to a place of safety, in open daylight, was a much more difficult problem. In his extremity, accordingly, he had to resort to those expedients nearest at hand.

This led him down a secluded by-way, where the powder shack of a construction company still stood half way up a wooden hillside. At the end of a tunnel piercing this hillside was a timbered chamber for high explosives. Guarded as it was with its double lock, the Laughing Mask seemed an expert in the manipulation of such obstacles, since five minutes' work with his skeleton keys threw open that well hidden room. Once there, he even ventured to explore his surroundings and take from their cases certain small cylinders incased in grease-stained paper. He did not explain to the already over-awed girl, however, that those

grease stains were made by a substance known as nitroglycerin, nor did he explain to her, at the end of his quiet yet hurried labors, that the looped line hanging at the tunnel mouth was in any way connected with the fulminate caps which he had placed so precariously close to his buried mine. But it was well, he remembered, to be prepared for such men as Legar and his followers.

"Now," said the masked figure, turning to the girl, "I want you to stay here until I get back."

Waiting for her deliverer's return, however, proved neither a pleasant nor a tranquilizing pastime. The girl became restless. Then she became worried. Then she even ventured to creep out along the rough-hewn passageway, to where the tunnel opened on a shelf of rock and gravel half way up the hillside. Screened as it was with shrubbery she could see little of the valley before her. The only point of light that met her gaze was a black touring car crawling along the valley road. When that car turned off the road and twisted and rocked in between the bushes below her she thought, at first, that it was her unknown guardian returning to her. But when she saw five men cautiously emerge from that half-hidden car and creep still closer through the underbrush, she felt sure that they were not approaching as friends. For a moment her heart leaped up into her mouth. Then she breathed again, for she saw that they were not approaching her hiding place, but apparently seeking one of their own. And as they foregathered behind a screen of scrub oak not more than thirty feet below her she knew both by their guarded tones and their general conspiratorial aspect that they stood intent on their own ends, quite oblivious of her and her hiding place.

Her face paled, however, as she heard the clearer and more authoritative tones of one of these speakers. For that voice, she knew, belonged to Legar, and only to Legar.

The girl, pushing her cautious way through the bushes, leaned even closer over the ledge. Then she held her breath, for she saw that her movements had loosened the gravel at her feet and sent a covey of bowlders careening down the hillside. The voices below at the same time came to a sudden stop. In another moment she could hear the crash of hurrying feet through the tangled shrubbery.

Before she could turn and fly Legar and his four evil-faced followers were charging up the slope. They were upon her, cutting off her retreat before she could dodge back into the passageway. Yet she did not surrender without a struggle. She fought them back as best she could, standing at bay with her back against the rocky hillside. It was not until Legar's hand clamped like a vise on her arm that she screamed, and screamed again.

A masked figure picking his cautious way along the crest of the hill above them heard that cry and seemed to understand its meaning. For, on hearing that repeated scream, he no longer picked his way, but ran frantically, and with all his speed. So precipitately did he scurry down that rocky hillside, in fact, that he descended in a flying leap in the very midst of Legar's followers clustered about the girl. He landed like a fallen plumb bob, heels down, knocking one of the conspirators sprawling over the cliff edge as he came another he sent with a well-aimed blow in the same direction. The third was not disposed of so easily. But an adept jiu-jitsu twist of the body sent this opponent diving headfirst into the loose gravel. It was then that Legar, seeing his men going down about him like nincomps, released his clutch on the girl's arm to draw his revolver.

At the same moment that he did so the man in the mask, swinging the girl sharply about, darted for the tunnel-mouth. He was through it before Legar could level his gun and fire. He was half-sliding, half-dragging the panting girl down the narrow passage before any of the band could follow. But before he dodged for the hidden powder house he threw up his free hand and caught at the loop which hung there at the end of his line. And he pulled it vigorously as he ran.

The result of that simple movement was both prompt and appalling. The thunder of a great detonation shook the earth. The rocky hillside erupted into a sudden volcano of flying earth and gravel, flinging its tons of debris into the echoing valley. And under the debris could be seen the still struggling limbs of Legar and his men.

But the man in the mask did not linger to witness those struggles. He darted with the white-faced girl out of the broken tunnel mouth, dragged her hurriedly up the slope and circled down through rock and underbrush to where his hidden car awaited him.

The Secret Attack.

Enoch Golden was no longer a contemptuously indifferent man as he faced his attorney, John Sibley, hurriedly summoned for a conference.

"I tell you, Sibley," said the man of millions, "something has to be done, and done soon. I'm surrounded by enemies I can't run down, enemies I can't even understand. In the first place, there's this man in a mask stalking through my house and planning threats to my doorsteps. Then—"

"Wait," cut in the man of law. "Did anyone actually see this man of the mask?"

"Yes, Wilson, my butler, came face to face with him as he stepped out of a passageway. Then, when my secretary, Manley, started in pursuit of the intruder, instead of finding a stranger in this fool mask, he found his way blocked by a girl, a girl in a cloak, who seemed to come there out of thin air. And that girl, sir, turned out to be my own daughter, my own daughter in some miraculous way rescued from Legar."

"Brought there by the man in the mask?"

"Yes, brought there by him. So she asserts. Yet this stranger, who brings me back the one thing precious in my life, on the same day assumes to criticize my conduct and threatens to rob me of my money."

"But that threat, as I've already pointed out, is foolish. Your money has all the protection that steel and civilization can surround it with. It lies in the vaults of the Third National bank."

"But I tell you I am surrounded by enemies, by unknown enemies of great skill and daring. That has already been proved. And while they can never make me cower, they have at least made me cautious."

"I guess we'd better all go down to the Third National and make sure they're not putting their gold and notes out on the windowsills for the first crook that comes along to carry off," said the lawyer.

President Stonington of the Third National received them in his private office and learned from Sibley the reason of his visit. That official, in fact, was an active sharer in the incredulity of the old lawyer. He quietly touched a bell, sent for a uniformed attendant and instructed that attendant



"It's the Laughing Mask Again!" Said Legar With an Oath.

to escort his visitor to the bank vaults.

"Be so good, Mr. Wells, as to show our clients that our vaults are not made of tissue paper."

This the attendant took much pride in doing.

The array of defensive measures, puzzling as it was to the younger members of the party, served to bring a sense of assurance to Enoch Golden himself.

A certain one-armed criminal, nevertheless, was at that precise moment very busily engaged in preparing for his assault on this Gibraltar of gold so proudly regarded as impregnable. Two workmen in the uniform of General Electric employees, exploring a section of abandoned cable gallery, were busily engaged in enlarging a wire conduit which met this gallery at right angles. There, by means of an electric mining drill, they burrowed like two moles deep beneath the level of the street along which the traffic of a great city so carelessly ebbed and flowed. From a manhole opening into this gallery was quietly passed a huge cylinder of iron capped by a drum of zinc having a hinged cover. The two subterranean workers had been warned to handle the cylinder with the utmost care. And this they did, knowing full well that its weight was due to the fact of its being tightly packed with high explosive.

Legar himself, in the meantime, having clothed a number of his henchmen in uniforms and caps bearing the inscription "Western National Bank," directed his attention to the much more critical task of tracing the signature, Henry H. Stonington, on a typewritten sheet bearing the embossed imprint of the Third National.

His next move, once he had received a report that his two gallery workers had fitted their massive cylinder in the wire conduit and pushed it gently but firmly into the uttermost recesses of that conduit by means of a jointed bamboo pole, was to verify the time at which the detonating clock had been set, advise his colleagues, and take up his position in the window of a building commanding a view of the great granite-banded bank itself.

He consulted his watch from time to time, with his eyes always going hungrily back to the heavy-pillared bank entrance itself.

"In one minute," he announced, "they'll get a dose of the medicine they gave us this morning." Again he looked at his watch.

A sudden thud and roar of sound cut off all smaller sounds. Then came the cries of terror-stricken human beings, shrill calls for help, hoarse shouts from stalwart figures in uniforms, and the sudden shrill of a policeman's whistle. The clamor and tumult of the streets rose above the quick and ever-nearing throb of engine bells, the gongs of ambulances, the rattle of iron-tired patrol wagons pounding over car rails, the shouts of blue-coated patrolmen already forming their cordon around the dust-crowned ruins.

"Fire!" was the cry that filled the canyon! "The building's on fire!"

And it was then that Legar replaced his watch in his pocket, and tossing aside the field glasses through which he had been viewing the street, showed that he was once more himself.

"Now's the time, men," he announced to his followers, "to get ready for work!"

The Bitter Bitten.

The news of the Third National bank outrage soon spread through the city. And as the resultant fire grew in intensity the crowd in the neighborhood grew in volume. Police reserves, marshaled by a stalwart and stern-faced captain, had already established their fire lines and still fought back the overcurious that trampled the long scorpions of black hose and kept edging and shouldering ever closer to the scene of the great catastrophe.

There was no relaxing of vigilance, in fact, when the limousine of Enoch Golden himself came thrbbing and crawling through that densely packed mob of human beings, Golden himself, alighting from that car, pleaded and stormed in vain with the inexorable officials confronting him. And while he still frantically argued and demanded a hearing with the officers in charge, a second vehicle made its way towards the still smoldering ruins.

This second vehicle was a motor truck on which was mounted not only a number of men in the uniform of bank attendants, but also a police lieu-

tenant, who had been requisitioned to clear a way through the crowd. For this was not the intrusion of mere curiosity seekers. That much the captain in charge of the police lines promptly discovered when he was on the point of ordering both truck and attendants out of the forbidden territory. For the cool-eyed man in command of that truck had come well armed for any such emergency. Into the astonished hands of the police official he thrust an authoritative-looking document from the president of the Third National himself.

This letter of introduction read: To the Officials in Charge: Acting on an emergency decision of our directors, I herewith authorize the agents of the Western National Bank to take possession of and remove the contents of Third National Bank vaults to the vaults of the Western National.

As this decision was arrived at to frustrate any possible interference with our gold and collateral when so obviously exposed, I trust you will do everything possible to expedite the removal of this treasure to a place of safety.

Yours very truly, JOHN ELIOT STONINGTON, President.

At the same time that the police captain, acting on this peremptory order, was clearing a path to the neighborhood of the still smoking vaults, Enoch Golden, with Margory and Manley at his side, was fighting to break through those jealously guarded fire lines. And at the sight of the motor truck and the Western National attendants his antics became even more frenzied than before.

"I tell you I've got to get in there!" he shouted to the apathetic patrolman holding him back.

"Yes," agreed the patrolman, "of course you'd like to get in there." "But I tell you I'm Enoch Golden," was the financier's frantic cry.

"I don't care if you're the president of the United States," was the retort. "You stay out."

It was young Manley himself, who, watching his chance, suddenly slipped in through the lines and gained the side of the busy captain before he could be stopped. For already the work of removing the vault contents was under way.

"You've got to keep this gold from going out," the young man cried into the face of the somewhat astounded captain.

"Who are you?" demanded that offi-

cial. "And what pipe smoke did you pick that idea from?"

"I picked it from a warning that came to Enoch Golden this morning. I tell you you're handing forty millions to a bunch of crooks on a forged order!"

The captain called to a couple of his men, "Tierney, and you, Doolan, take this bug-shooter in charge."

"Then telephone to Stonington himself," cried the frantic Manley struggling in the grip of his captors. Get him on the wire himself, and see what he says!"

"Patterson," he called out. "Take charge here, and don't let this motor truck move an inch until I verify this order of Stonington's." Then he turned to Manley. "You come with me."

The triumphant light soon went out of young Manley's face, however, as he stood beside the captain in the telephone booth. He could hear that official call for the number, ask for Stonington, and crisply demand of the banker if the order for the vault transfer was authentic or not.

"Of course it's authentic! And I want to know what this game is! What are you and your bunch cut there trying to put over?"

But Manley knew what he knew.

"I tell you that wasn't Stonington that spoke. It couldn't have been!"

cried the desperate young secretary. The captain was already on his feet and fighting his way back to the fire lines.

"Then suppose you go up and tell him he's been dreaming," raked the irate official. "Then get his affidavit to that effect and amble back with it."

Manley himself was already darting for the door.

"That's just what I'll do," he called out as he made for the corner of Broadway on the run, and there, still on the run, leaped to the running board of an empty taxicab north bound.

Manley's wait on Stonington's doorstep was doubly disquieting. Still more disquieting, however, was that obese banker's reply to the questions so fiercely hurled at him.

"I gave out no such order. And no such telephone call ever came to my house tonight!"

"Then get your phone, quick!" Manley warned him. "Get police headquarters and stop that raid. Stop it inside of ten minutes or your bank'll look like a last year's bird nest!"

The excited man of finance, who had been shouting to his servants, suddenly ran to the nearest desk phone and struggled with the instrument. But his struggles were fruitless.

"My phone's dead," he cried out to Manley. "I can't raise central! I can't raise anything!"

"Then beat it for that bank of yours," advised Manley as he made for the door.

"Take me with you; for God's sake take me with you," cried Stonington, catching up his hat and coat and following him.

"I can't," retorted the young man as he darted for his waiting taxi. "I've got to look for a crook called Oyster Joe!"

The police lines about the ruins of the Third National bank, as Manley went scurrying through the streets still dreaming that a stranger had preceded him on that errand, had already been strengthened by additional reserves as the great motor truck with its bank guards was piled higher and higher with the gold from the blistering vaults. Then came the call for "Gangway!" And it became more and more evident that no timely interception was to rob Legar and his men of their spoils. The heavy truck was already crawling out from the curb, its great wheels crunching over cinders and charred wood, as a messenger ran up to the officer in charge, calling him to the telephone.

That official held the receiver in his hand as the motor truck, gathering speed as it threaded its way through a narrow aisle of open asphalt formed by surging humanity, rounded the corner into Broadway, thundered northward for three blocks, and again turned eastward.

By the time John Stonington's landaulet reached the bank, following the warning already sent on from headquarters, an empty vault lay amid the smoking ruins and Legar's galleon on wheels, loaded to the brim with its stolen gold, had slipped away unchallenged through the darkness and all trace of it had been lost.

The objective of that wheeled galleon, however, seemed to have been nicely appreciated by Oyster Joe, quietly smoking on the deck of an extremely powerful engine but extremely dirty launch moored in the shadow of a wharf. That worthy, indeed, showed a marked preference for gloom, since neither his cabin nor his deck lamps were alight. Equally without light was the lumbering truck which crawled cautiously down to the lip of the wharf, where, after an exchange of quietly whistled signals, a number of vaguely outlined figures set about lifting a pile of small but sturdy canvas sacks and boxes from the motor truck to the waiting launch. This was done in utter silence. The moment the transfer had been completed the launch slipped out from the wharf shadow.

Morose as seemed the man steering that launch, the two newcomers who had been ordered aboard his craft, after it had been so silently and quickly loaded, occupied much of his attention. It was soon plain, however, that he had small wish for conversation with them. When, after three miles of silent travel, during which the white-bearded man at the wheel had responded with nothing more than a

sulky grunt, one of the newcomers suddenly struck a match and held it close to the white-bearded face, the hands gripping the wheel quite as suddenly relinquished their hold and fastened themselves about the throat of the overinquisitive cargo sentry. Before his companion, standing quite close to the bow of the boat, could quite realize the meaning of the movement, the two men beside the wheel were writhing and stamping and panting about the narrow deck.

Fierce as that fight was, it was not a prolonged one. For the white-bearded man, despite his age, with one final effort, succeeded in lifting his op-



Legar Took Up His Position at a Window.

ponent clear of the deck-boards and flung him headforemost into the black water. Then he turned and braced himself for the charge of the second man. This second man he met by dropping quite flat and unexpectedly on the deck itself. He felt the charging body go over his own, caught at one still kicking foot as he twisted quickly about, and before his opponent could recover from that fall the patriarchal boat owner had assisted his unwelcome guest over the deck-rail after his companion.

But, oddly enough, in that struggle the bewhiskered old boatman had undergone a sudden and startling change. The clutching fingers of his enemy in the second contest along the boatdeck had buried themselves in the thick white beard decorating that launch owner's chin. And when this enemy went overboard that fringe of whiskers went with him, leaving at the wheel a somewhat altered and considerably younger looking man. And that this unknown ascender of destinies was still intent on nursing the secret of his identity was further evidenced by the fact that, before turning his boat about and facing the ebb-tide current of the North river, he carefully adjusted over his nose a narrow band of yellow cloth, with its little apron of an inverted crescent. Still later, as he closely watched the light-spangled shore line, he caught sight of two small winging eyes of green and red. Accepting this apparently as a signal, he swung in close under the shadow of a coal barge and made fast at the slip end, where high above him a waiting taxicab stood close beside the stringpiece. Yet, hurried as the man in the mask seemed to be, he took time to sit under one of the cabin lamps and indite a short epistle. This epistle, addressed to "Enoch Golden and his friends," read as follows:

The Funds of the Third National bank vault are now in my possession and will be duly returned to the rightful owners. But that I may enjoy the luxury of the game as well as the name, I am withholding from those returned funds the fifty thousand dollars in gold which was formerly the property of the man who, by oppressing the poor, has compelled this action. When that man looks into his own heart and returns to the paths of wisdom, this gold will be returned to him by

THE LAUGHING MASK.

Still later that night while Davie Manley and Margory Golden and her father were arguing and wondering as to the origin and full meaning of this strange message, Legar and his men, emerging like water rats from the river-front rendezvous close beside the Owl's Nest, piled into a harbor launch with a muffled kicker and silently made their way for Oyster Joe's.

Crowding into the dimly lit loft of Oyster Joe, they found themselves confronted, not by the millions in stolen treasure, but by a stiff-jointed and blasphemous old man in white whiskers, tied and lashed to one of his own shack beams.

"Don't yelp at me about your damned gold," cried Oyster Joe, with a sulphurous string of oaths, when he was able to speak. "I never saw any gold! All I saw was that chain lightning gink in a mask, the gink who's double-crossed me twice at the same game!"

Legar staggered back into a broken chair.

"So it's the Laughing Mask again!" he said with an oath.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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Pulp for Paper.

It is reported that the department of agriculture is experimenting with wire grass as a source of supply for pulp for making paper. In place of poplar or loblolly, this variety of grass grows on the Pacific coast and in western Mexico, and possesses the very desirable property of toughness and can be reduced by the soda process. It is stated that paper manufactured from the stock has proved as satisfactory in physical tests as a first-grade machine-finished printed paper. In appearance and in feeling the paper produced is satisfactory. However, the experiments have indicated that more bleaching powder is required in the bleaching process than in the case of poplar stock.

This Is No Joke.

They graduated in June.

"What are you doing now?" asked the dear girl in the dialogue.

"Newspaper work," replied the young man. "I have charge of the 'Hints to Mothers' column on the Daily Planet. And you?"

"Oh, I'm doing a similar stunt," answered the dear girl. "I write the 'Man about Town' articles for the Daily Gusher."

An Unwelcome Variety.

"Is Blizzing an optimist?"

"Yes. But he's one of the kind that reminds you of all your troubles and then tells you to cheer up."



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